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TOM TERROR,

THE

OUTLAW.

JACKSON'S NOVELS

JAMES JACKSON.

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TOM TERROR.

CHAPTER I.

TOM TERROR, as he was fitly named, had already made a name which will never be erased from the annals of danger and death that a thousand pens have traced in crimson ink.

He had ridden from Custer City, five months prior to the date of our story, with a rope about his neck, and in the midst of a score of the most determined men that ever hung an outlaw.

But the bird in the hand on that occasion did not prove worth two in the bush.

The Vigilantes of Custer had made one mistake. Tom Terror had been permitted to ride his own horse to the spot chosen for his exit.

A word to his horse had been sufficient.

A wild snort, a leap forward like a startled stag, a dozen pistol-shots, a lot of charging men, told the story of how the bird in the hand got back to the bush.

And now Tom Terror had returned to the canyon through which he had galloped with a rope around his neck.

An Indian, keen-eyed and acute, might have passed him and never have seen man or horse.

"I war right. The boys are on the old stampin'-ground!" he ejaculated.

Presently the outlines of six or seven mounted figures came in sight.

Tom seemed to experience the pleasure that fills the heart of an exiled chief when he finds himself once more with his men.

The Indians were lightly attired. Not one of the party possessed a gun, but each of them carried a weapon of death more horrible than the singing bullet.

They came on until they were almost directly in front of the watcher. Their faces were plainly visible in the moonlight. As Tom Terror looked he counted them.

"Is it possible that they've been reduced to six? By the jumpin' jingo! somebody's been here since I've been gone! What would they say war I to step out an' say—'Wal, boys, I'm back?' Gosh all varmints! how they'd jump! And mebbe I'd get the string before they'd recognized their old cap'n!"

At that moment the Indians started, and looked into each other's faces.

Tom looked toward the north.

"I hear it, too," he said. "By Jove! the boys ar' gittin' the strings ready."

The Indians had drawn a dark cord from their breasts. As it swung loose a little ball dangled from one end.

Down the canyon came the galloping of two horses.

When the game was in sight, Tom Terror shrunk instinctively against the wall of the canyon, and uttered a cry which he tried very hard to suppress.

Instead of two men, he saw a brace of youthful figures.

Although both were dressed in masculine apparel, the quick eye of the Gulch Tiger detected the dissimilarity of their features, and decided that one belonged to the gentler sex.

The hat worn by the person could not conceal a lot of rich auburn hair, and the garments, revealing a figure whose symmetry was faultless, served to confirm the tiger's suspicions.

This individual's companion was doubtless a boy.

He was strongly built, athletic, and youthfully handsome; there was spirit in his sloe-black eyes, energy and determination lurked at the corners of his mouth. He did not appear armed, but Tom could not see his right hand—there was something deadly in that.

A coil of black rope, like a lasso, hung at the left-hand side of his saddle.

"Thunder an' shot! I've struck all ov 'em—the string boys an' the chap I came back hyar to find. But, whar did he pick thet angel up? an' who is she, anyhow?"

"Great heavens! I want the boy," he cried. "If they give 'em the string I'll get nothin'. Now I must prevent that. I—"

The watcher was interrupted by a half-smothered cry that came from the throat of the boy s companion, as she,—if girl she really was—went backward.

Before Tom Terror could reach the spot the boy had checked the revolving ball, and the victim of the cord lay in his arms.

"Fiends, you shall pay for this!" he cried. "Ha! you would finish me, too!"

He threw up his right arm as he spoke, and the strange missiles that came from the shadows began to encircle it.

It was the cord of the Thug!

"Ha! ha!" rung out a fearless laugh as the arm was held up in the moonlight for a brief minute. "What a pitiful rope you use! Mine is twice as strong, and I use it, too. Why don't your devilish leader come back, and give me a chance to use it on him?"

"He hez come back!" roared Tom at that moment. "I'm hyar, you

little imp! I've got a warrant for you—the kind that we sometimes serve on a knife."

The boy turned upon the speaker.

"Tom Terror himself, by the Land of Nod!" he exclaimed. "But you will not serve your warrant here. Back! back!" he held a pistol in his hand. "You can find me almost any day in Cut-throat Canyon. I've been holding court at Satan's Tree. Go down and look at the culprits. I'm glad you've come back. We will make this gap our battle-ground. I try, condemn, and execute. I've a kind of travelling court that sits constantly. I'm judge, jury, prosecuting attorney, and sheriff. Have a care, Tiger Tom! We need no introduction, but here's my card, anyhow."

As the boy ceased, he snatched something from a pocket above his belt, and tossed it at the Gulch Tiger.

It struck him in the face, and fell upon his horse's neck, where it stopped.

"Good-night. Follow if you want to, but I hold court in the saddle as often as anywhere. Come, Myra, we must go."

The boy's last words were addressed to the white face, into which he threw a hasty glance.

At the same moment the two horses started forward; their speed soon appeared to rival the flight of an arrow.

Tom did not follow. Bewildered and amazed, he sat still and looked down the canyon.

He was surrounded by the Indians who had urged their horses from the shadows. They were congratulating him on his return; but he did not seem to hear.

"Thar's grit an' death in thet boy," he muttered. "He's the one I'm after. I can't be mistaken, but I didn't expect to find 'im sech a match for me. His card? Ah, yes, let me see. What does the little gopher call himself, anyhow?—

"JUDGE LYNCH, JR.

"Court always in Session! Villains executed with neatness and dispatch!

"Hanging cheerfully attended to at all hours!"

Tom looked up at the expectant Indians, and gave a long whistle of wonderment.

"Well, this beats my time all holler!" he said. "Judge Lynch, Jr., eh? Wal, thar's one feller what he will never hang!"

Not many hours after the events related, the Custer City stage entered the canyon

Already the long shadows of approaching night were falling, and Cut-throat Canyon was fast becoming the prince of places for road-agents.

The man who held the lines was eager to reach his journey's end.

Apparently empty was the stage. If it contained a passenger he could not be seen ; but there were gloomy corners in the old vehicle, large and dark enough to conceal a man.

" One mile more, an' then—thunder an' guns ! just as I expected !" cried old Jack Drivewell.

Instinctively old Jack drew rein.

Before him, in the middle of the narrow road, stood what seemed to be an equestrian statue.

To the driver, horse and rider wore gigantic proportions, which were rendered more than half ghostly by the prevailing shadows.

" He looks like Tom Terror himself ; but—"

Quickly upward shot the right arm of the spectre. Old Jack saw the deadly revolver clutched in the giant's hand.

He had moved nearer he might have touched the lead horse with the muzzle of his revolver.

" Hello, Jack !"

" Ar' thet you, Tom ?'

" Yes ; didn't I say I'd come back ?"

" Wal, I don't know," drawled Jack. " Fellars what ain't wanted ginerally come home."

Old Jack thought he saw a smile at the corners of the Gulch Tiger's mouth.

" So I'm not wanted here ?"

" Of course not."

A moment's silence followed. Jack saw the horseman's eyes wander to the stage.

" Empty, Jack ?"

" Yes ; thunderin' poor trip ; this road's got unpopular o' late. Do THEY know you're back ?"

" Guess not."

" May I tell 'em ?"

" If I let you go—yes."

Jack, startled by these ominous words, felt a cold thrill shoot through his veins.

" Jack—old Jack it used to be, while we sifted an' panned on Feather River—why ar' you drivin' stage when thar's a gold-mine at yer feet ?"

" A gold-mine !" echoed the driver, dazedly.

" Sartainly, an' one that beats the Emma King all holler."

" Ye're tryin' me, lad. I—"

" No. I want to sse you git into better business than ridin' over four wheels at eighty dollars a month. Jack, you're out o' yer sphere up thar. I say come down an' work the mine that lies at yer feet."

Jack began to catch the import of Tom's words.

" Ef we work it right we can buy all the mines in this great kentry."

Old Jack flung his whip to the ground.

"I'm with you, Tom!" he cried.

"I thought you would be. But what will we do with the stage an' yer sleepy passenger?"

"Oh, that's easy. I'll wake 'im up, an' tell 'im that I've left the business. He kin drive the hosses through to Custer."

Tom's eyes glistened.

"He is the very man I want," he said, looking at the old stage-driver.

Jack, springing agilely over the horse, struck the ground, and turned toward the stage.

As the air was bracing, but not cold, the stage was open, and Jack, leaping upon the hub of the left fore wheel, was about to thrust his bronzed face inside when he sprung back with a cry of surprise.

The Gulch Tiger started forward.

What did he see?

He saw two revolvers thrust from the window, and between them appeared a face illumined by a smile of triumph. But the eye glittered like a snake's; they seemed full of death.

"A deuced pretty game you two vermin are playing," said the man at the window. "Jack, I'll deal with you first. Go up or down! I'll give you a minute. If I drive this stage to Custer I'll leave you here with your toes pointing to the stars. I don't waste words. The devil on that horse knows this. Now, Jack, go up or down."

Jack glanced at Tom.

That worthy was staring at the face at the stage window.

"They've met before," Jack muttered; "I guess I'd better go up."

The Canyon Tiger glanced for a moment at the driver, and then lifted his head, as if to say, "Go up."

Sullenly, and with many a muttered curse, old Jack climbed to his box again.

"If you attempt a treacherous move, I'll take the lines from you, or rather they'll drop suddenly from your hands."

Jack heard but did not speak.

"Come up here, Tom Terror!"

The revolvers which were covering the outlaw's face carried him forward.

Jack, expecting a conversation between the two, bent down.

"Now do your duty," said the man at the window, in a commanding whisper. "Do not forget for a moment that if you fail—or if you associate anybody with you—I will flood your brains with daylight. You must do it alone—alone, I tell you! The path is before you; at the end of it is a bonanza, a real palpable one; but between you and it is death—death by the trigger I am touching now!"

Old Jack did not hear all; the sentences that fell on his ears were disjointed, but not altogether meaningless.

Therefore, he was not startled to hear Tom say in his usual tone of voice—

"Jack, drive this gentleman through to Custer."

The next moment the stage was rolling through the canyon, watched with strange curiosity by the individual whom it left behind.

"Here you ar'!" announced old Jack, as he drew up before one of the young city's hotels, a large wooden structure from which loud voices came. "Here's the Gold Bug, the house whar all my best passengers stop."

The man was on the ground as Jack spoke, and the next instant was walking toward the hostelry.

He entered the bar-room with the air of an old frequenter of such places. His eyes took in the crowd in several restless glances; but, all at once, he seemed to shrink from the scene.

He stopped almost suddenly, for a hand dropped somewhat lightly on his shoulder.

Deadly Dan, as the young man called himself, wheeled quickly.

He stood face to face with the young buck.

"Brother, come back!" ejaculated the Indian, his eyes filled with recognition.

"Yes, and I'm twice as desperate as the starving wolf. Hold your tongue. If you move it again, I'll scatter your brains right and left to the winds!"

It was plain that the twain who consulted each other in the smoky bar-room had met before.

There was threatful defiance in Deadly Dan's eyes; savage pleasure and revenge in the Indian's.

"Brother didn't expect to find Red Crest here?"

"Curse you, no! but since we have met—"

"We might make one trail, eh, brother?"

"If that is what you mean, yes!" grated Dan, and the hand that had rested lightly on his hip glided to his revolver.

The quick eye of the Indian detected the movement.

"Not here, brother," he said, quietly, but with unmistakable eagerness in his tone. "Too many here."

"As you please," murmured Dan. "But I thought that the son of the forest might want to die under a roof like decent white people."

For a moment the young Indian did not reply; but he unsealed his red lips again it was to say "Come!" as he turned suddenly on his heel.

Red Crest was moving toward the low-browed door, confident that Deadly Dan was on his heels.

"It is the only card I can play; he turned the Jack on me before I had been ten minutes in Custer. I didn't expect to see him here, but we had to meet some time. I must follow him—yes, I must kill him!"

Red Crest being the guide, led the way. They left the town behind,

and after ten minutes' walk, the Indian halted at what appeared to be the mouth of a little gulch.

"Here!" he said, whirling upon his antagonist.

Deadly Dan, for the first time, started as if the monosyllable had exploded a shell at his feet.

"I've been a fool—a confounded idiot!" he murmured. "While we were coming down here, I was leaving the golden opportunity slip. I was thinking, but not about the vital interests of the hour—not about the life I was bringing down here to put up for an Indian's target. No, curse me! If I had recurred to business for one brief minute, I would now be going back to Custer alone—yes, alone!"

Did the gleaming eyes of Red Crest discern the thoughts that were flitting through the Sport's brain? If they had not, why did he say—

"Red Crest trusted his brother who might have shot him as they walked."

"And you might have winged me," Deadly Dan remarked with a faint smile. "One must fear the other, eh, Indian?"

The light of unrestrained curiosity twinkled in the Indian's eyes.

"What is the boy to Dan?" he asked. "Why does he come back from the far-off cities of the white people to hunt him like a wolf?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Red Crest eager."

"It is a secret—one that I would not whisper to the winds. But why need I keep it back when we are to fight to the death—until, probably, both fall dead? I will tell you, Red Crest. I will whisper in your ears the white man's secret."

Deadly Dan stepped forward with the last sentence on his lips.

His eagle-like glance had probably detected that curiosity was mastering the young Sioux.

"Now is my time!" he muttered.

Red Crest had been thrown off his guard. He even went forward to greet the Sport's secret; but the next moment, with the restless bound of the jungle tiger, Deadly Dan shot forward, and a hand of death and vengeance was at the Indian's throat!

The vehemence of Deadly Dan's spring lifted the Indian from the ground, and the next instant he went backward, only to fall heavily nearer the darkened mouth of the little gulch with the weight of his antagonist on his chest.

"You're a sharp redskin," he said; "but you've betrayed your last man. Now go and join the brethren I sent downward from the camp on the Rosebud!"

The knife flew upward, armed with vengeance, but the next instant a voice caused Dan to spring erect without having struck the deadly blow.

"If you've no objection, pard, I'd like to take a hand in that game!" said the voice.

The dirk almost dropped from Dan's hand, and for several moments he

presented a splendid picture of amazement as he stood in the moonlight, staring at the individual who had spoken.

"The boy, by the cups of Bacchus!" fell from Dan's lips. "This is a meeting most unexpected, and decidedly unpleasant. The youngster's got the drop on me, and there's no reason in the world why he should let up on Deadly Dan. But he doesn't seem to recognise me. Maybe—"

The Sport's sentence was broken by the sudden spring with which Red Crest regained his feet.

"Brother! brother! See! see! it is the Wolf of the Rosebud!" the Indian cried, turning to the boy. "He is on the trail once more!"

A startling cry came from the youngster's throat as he sprung forward.

Deadly Dan instinctively shrunk from the revolver which the boy thrust madly into his face. He was not ready for the fatal bullet.

"No!" suddenly cried the boy. "Brave men die by the pistol; cowards and murderers by the rope. Seize him, Red Crest!"

A panther-like bound carried the Indian forward; he fell upon Deadly Dan, tore the knife from his hand, and made him captive.

"Bring him along," said the youth, turning away.

The Sport did not resist. He seemed to have bewildered him.

As he moved along, the Indian completely disarmed him; he was at the mercy of the pair.

When a halt was made Deadly Dan found himself before two horses that stood in the shadow of the gulch walls.

"One moment, boy," said Dan, turning to the strange youth. "I want to know what this means? Tell Deadly Dan what you are going to do with him. I'm the Wolf of the Rosebud again. I can hear anything."

A smile flitted across the boy's handsome countenance, and he answered by thrusting a card into the Sport's hand.

Dan glanced at it curiously, and threw himself back in the saddle until his body was in the moonlight. Then, holding the card before his eager eyes, he read—

"JUDGE LYNCH, JR.

"Court always in session," etc., etc.

The boy and Indian watched him narrowly, but they saw no quivering of the lips as he turned to the former—

"Well, what of it?" asked Deadly Dan. "Yes, boy, what do I care for the rigmarole on this card? You are the self-instituted Judge Lynch, I suppose."

"Judge Lynch, at your service," said the boy, doffing his hat with mock politeness. "And I have the honour of informing you, Rosebud Dan, that my court is about to hold a night session"

Before the Sport could reply, the horses started forward, and a moment after the party went through the little gulch.

Red Crest, the Sioux, with his hand at Deadly Dan's bridle, trotted tirelessly at the head of his steed.

CHAPTER II.

Having made up his mind, Old Jack went to each horse and patted his strong neck affectionately. They had been fast friends as beast and master, and there was a warm corner in the old man's heart for each.

He had just unharnessed them from the stage in which he had carried Deadly Dan to Custer City.

He felt that his time had come, as he left Custer and urged his horse toward Cut-throat Canyon. He had long believed, in secret, that his old pard, Tom Terror, was the leader of the Thugs that infested the famous pass; he was confident of it now, and it would be safe to say that, as he rode along, his neck did not itch as formerly.

Three hours had scarcely passed since his encounter with Tom, therefore he expected to find him near the spot where he had stopped the stage.

Whatever the feeling of security that quieted the deserter's spirits, he drew his pistols as his horse entered the shades of Cut-throat, and then, applying the heavy Mexican spurs which he had strapped to his heels, he went down the canyon like a fugitive from justice.

"Hyar I am, but no Tom," he said, drawing rein on the spot where he had had his adventure with the Gulch Tiger.

"Hyar's whar he told me about the bonanza thet beats the Emma King, an' thar is whar I stood on the tongue an' listened till I saw Old Jack drivin' a golden carriage through the streets ov 'Frisco. Why didn't you wait hyar fur me, Tom? You might hev knowed thet I'd come back jist as quick as I could unhitch, an' say goodbye to the hosses. Tom, pard, whar ar' ye?"

He had mentally resolved to go back to his horses when a sound that made him turn, saluted his ears.

"Ah! Tom, you did come!" he exclaimed, for the Gulch Tiger sat before him as natural as life.

"I didn't think you would come back," was the answer.

"Not for a share in your bonanza?"

'Mebbe I war fooling you, Jack."

The old driver's countenance fell.

"Foolin' me—Old Jack, yer pard?" the old fellow said dazedly. "I've left the route, desarted my hosses, turned my back on Custer—for a share in the big bonanza that beats the Emma King—"

Tom Terror laughed.

Jack gritted his teeth; that cruel cachinnation sent the last bird of hope screaming from his avaricious heart. It dissipated his dream of gold.

"Tom, you don't mean all thet thet laugh said," Jack cried. "Is thar really no bonanza—"

"Thar's one for every man, but he must get it for himself," was the interruption as heartless as the laugh.

The rough hand of Jack Drivewell had glided to the revolver that rested at his right thigh, but his eye was fixed on the figure before him.

"Hold on, Jack! Draw that weapon and you'll hunt for bonanza in a kentry where they don't hev any," said the Canyon Thug, sternly, as the driver's hand touched the butt of his pistol. Go back to the road and you'll strike one some day."

"I can't do thet, Tom. I've left the road. From this night I'm Old Jack, the Bonanza Hunter."

The reply of the Gulch Tiger was the lifting of his right hand.

"Thet's the signal!" went through Jack's brain.

Ay, signal it was.

Suddenly, through the air came the whirr of that deadly missile whose work we have already seen.

Jack instinctively threw up his hand, but too late.

The fatal coil struck his meager length of throat, and the leaden ball revolving with great rapidity drew it tighter and tighter at each revolution.

Old Jack saw the Canyon Tiger fade into indistinctness; darkness came down the sides of the gulch like a descending pall; he reeled and tried to shriek. Rising in his heavy stirrups, he clutched the deadly cord, and attempted to tear it from his throat.

Tom turned away, and several Indian-like figures leaped from the shadows.

"Finish 'im!" the Tiger said.

The three Canyon Wolves darted toward the writhing man, and the foremost fired point-blank at him with a revolver.

Old Jack's hand dropped from the cord, and his horse sprung forward. Then bang! bang went two more pistols, as the pebbles were loosened by the iron-shod feet, and the victim of the Thugs disappeared from view.

"But if Old Jack Drivewell gets over it, there'll be a general settlement one of these days in Cut-throat Canyon. Now listen to me: we encountered a boy an' a gal last night. You gave the beauty the string, but the boy got away. He is the chap I am looking for. Mind you, *I* am to settle with him. If you catch him—and catch him you must—you shall bring him to me. Do you understand?"

"We hear our chief," said Lodgepole. "He shall give the boy the cord."

"That is it," cried Tom, delightedly. "We understand each other now."

"And I understand you all, monsters!"

Quick as thought every Thug turned his face upward, for the voice had come from the star-kissing cliffs overhead.

The next instant a wild cry leaped from the throats of all, and the Thugs dodged shudderingly.

As for Tom Terror, he fairly shrieked as he ducked his unhandsome head, and the next second a stone which would have crushed a giant grazed his hat and was shivered on the bed of the canyon.

"Great Jove! missed by a hair!" gasped the Tiger, and the spurring that he administered to his horse carried him many rods from the almost fatal spot.

Then, white-faced and gasping, he drew rein, and looked up at the cliffs overhead.

"It warn't the boy," he said. "The voice didn't sound like a human one. I'd call it a speerit, if speerits could handle sich rocks as that. Whar ar' the boys with the strings?"

"Here, chief."

Tom Terror looked; his band actually surrounded him.

"We must get away from here, for we can't dodge sich bullets every time," he said.

"No, monsters! the time is near at hand when they will strike and kill."

"Great Jehosaphat!" ejaculated the Canyon Terror. "Thar's vengeance and death in that voice. I recognize it now, though I only heard it once. It ar' the voice of the girl who war with the boy last night—the girl what got the string."

The red Thugs did not answer; but their gaze wandered from their chief to the top of the canyon wall.

The horse that carried Old Jack from the spot where Tom Terror had sacrified him to the deadly cords of his inhuman miscreants, dashed through the canyon at the top of his speed.

Unconscious and bleeding the bonanza-hunter lay, corpse-like, on the strong neck underneath which his rough hands were tightly clasped.

Out into the soft moonlight beyond the mouth of the gulch, went the animal with undiminished speed down the road to Custer until, having galloped through the woe-begone suburbs of the mining-town, he was checked by several iron hands before the hotel.

Flecked with foam, wild-eyed and panting heavily, the steed elicited a thousand ejaculations of wonder and surprise. The excited men, a score of whom belonged to Maverick Joe's Vigilantes, felt that the demons of Cut-throat had sent the horse on his awful gallop, and the marks of the cord, still visible on the driver's neck, confirmed their belief.

But what had taken Old Jack from the stage stables so soon after his arrival?

They carried him into the bar-room and examined his wounds. They found a bullet-hole in the right breast and a furrow in his neck, as if the last pellet had actually cut the fatal string loose.

Old Jack was subjected to some rough surgery, but it had the desired effect. He opened his eyes in the midst of the rough crowd burning to question him.

"What took me to Cut-throat?" he said. "Mebbe I dropped a valuable package from the stage. Would ye believe thet?"

"No!" said Maverick Joe, a little man, wiry, dark-faced and with eyes full of fox-like cunning "You don't lose freight in Cut-throat, Jack. Suthin' else took you down thar."

"Suthin' else did," confessed Jack. "But I didn't get it."

"Who did you see?"

"Old Tom."

The crowd started.

"He's come back as big as life, an' as onery as ever."

Maverick Joe stepped back. His little eyes were burning like twin stars

"Tom Terror has come back. Do you hear that, boys?"

The Vigilantes had heard, and as they gathered around their leader, the air seemed to become blue with oaths and threats of vengeance.

Maverick Joe walked through the crowd with a determined purpose written on his countenance. Twenty eager men were at his heels.

The men separated, each to saddle his horse.

Maverick Joe re-entered the hotel; but the place where Old Jack had lain was vacant.

"They took him down to his horses," explained a man. "He's got a bed there, and you know the stable is as good as many a house in Custer. He got delirious after you went out, and raved about a bonanza bigger than the Emma King. It must have had something to do with his trip to Cut-throat, for he mixed Tom Terror and the big bonanza together all the time."

The captain of the Vigilantes went out, and bent his steps toward Old Jack's stable.

Maverick Joe paused at the door and listened; but, not hearing any noise, he went in.

A lantern that hung on a nail afforded the light that revealed the interior. It showed the Vigilante the roughest kind of low cot, sitting bolt upright in which was the old driver. Maverick Joe stopped at the sight.

Jack's eyes were bloody fierce and wolfish; they rolled restlessly in their cavernous sockets, and told the Vigilante that the old man was at that moment wrestling with death.

"I'll strike it yet. Afore Old Jack pushes in his last chips, he'll get his hands on two things—Tom's throat and the big bonanza. Jack Drivewell, the stage-driver, ar' dead! but outen his ashes, phenix-like, hes risen Old Jack the throat-hunter, and bonanza king."

"You don't want me along!—thet's it! The bonanza is to be divided, eh?" the wild man had stopped and turned upon Joe; but the next moment he leaped forward, and the two men clutching, staggered through an avenue beside the stall and rolled among the horses' feet.

It was a struggle for life in the dark, for the partition of heavy boards that rose between them and Jack's sleeping-room shut off all light from the lantern.

For several moments the two men writhed and struggled there, then the door opened and Maverick Joe came out.

"I had to do it!" he groaned. "May Heaven have mercy on his soul and mine! but nobody heard the rumpus. Never mind, Jack; I'll find the throat you wanted, and, with that big bonanza, if it was not a merely a creation of a crazy head, I'll build you a monument that'll make yer speerit proud."

The Vigilantes' captain did not tarry.

If he had looked into the little room of the stable-home, still dimly lighted by the dusty lantern, he would have seen an inanimate form stretched upon the rumpled cot.

"Hyar's the cap'n," cried a score of voices, and Maverick Joe, roused by the sounds, found himself in the midst of his Vigilantes.

The men had been waiting for their leader, and in less than five minutes he placed himself at their head, mounted on his trusted horse Bonanza.

"I'm afraid Old Jack's dead," said the Vigilante captain. "Boys, we've got to avenge him. Tom Terror is back; he gave Jack his last dose. Think of this boys."

He got the desired response, oaths of vengeance and looks of eternal hatred.

The band that galloped toward Cut-throat knew every pebble that lay in the road. The Vigilantes went cautiously into the gulch; they glided among its shadows; they waited for their prey at different places with their fingers on their trigger.

"Nothing hyar," said Maverick Joe, disappointedly, after an hour's waiting at a certain point. "The game has slipped us for to-night. We must come ag'in. Lilly, Antenat and Moravy, you will remain in Cut-throat. We will go back and bury Old Jack."

It was with reluctance that the Vigilantes fell in line behind their leader. They must, perforce, give up the hunt for that night."

"Won't we give Jack a grand plantin' ?"

Maverick Joe looked at the handsome young Vigilante who rode at his side.

"Ay, we'll plant him well, Harry. I wish we could please 'im by burying Tom's throat and the big bonanza in the same grave."

"That bonanza business must have been imagination," answered the young man.

"Maybe so," said Joe, half-musingly. "But I've been thinking since I left Jack. Did you ever hear of that rumor?"

"About the girl, cap'n?"

"Yes. People don't talk about it much now. Jack used to talk about it. I recollect one night that he sat up till three—it was in his stable—talking about the women that he eloped with away down among the States. Old Jack used to be a good-looking young man, and not very long ago either."

"Oh, I never heard about the elopement," exclaimed the young Vigilante quickly. "What has that to do with the lost girl ?"

"A good deal if Jack told the truth. You see, Harry, Jack's wife was rich—her father had lots of the lumps—but she took up with Jack. Of course they had to run away, and the old man cut the girl off and cursed her besides. They had one child—a girl. She was born somewhere in Sacramento Valley. Jack and his wife showed that they could be as contrary as the old man. One day, five years after the elopement, a letter came from Jennie's father; but she spunked up and chucked it into the fire without opening it. What war in it nobody knows. It war the last one thet come. Jack said thet night in his stable thet he would give his right arm—and it war his business larm, too, to know what thet letter said. But the fire had cindered it. To make a long story short, Harry, Jennie died a year after thet, and Jack loaned his baby girl to an old pard, who went under the time the Feather Injuns got on their ears and killed everybody."

"But the girl—Jack's baby?"

"Thet's the mystery. Sometimes Jack used to say that his little Jennie war dead, and then he would think that, after all, he would see her agin. He would say that a big pile of money was coming to her. And now he is dead,

Harry, what is your opinion of that big bonanza which filled his mind at the last moments? Mightn't it mean more than imagination?"

The young Vigilante admitted that Maverick Joe might be right.

"I really wish he warn't dead," and the captain spoke with a deep sigh.

"May be he isn't," said Harry, a ray of hope lighting up his eyes.

"I guess all ar' gone—Jack, little Jennie, the big bonanza—all! And no man in Colorado hates it more than Maverick Joe."

The man looked up as he spoke; they were nearly out of the gulch; a few rods further on and the gray streaks of dawn would burst upon them from the far-away horizon, cloudless and gray.

But, all at once, in tones that startled both horse and rider, rung out a single word:

"*Halt!*"

Reins and revolvers were instantly drawn.

"Form into single rank, an' come on!" continued the same voice, which came from between two outstretched pistols. "I intend to hunt the big bonanza myself, and the throat of Tiger Tom is my property; it is not to be let out in shares. I've staked my claim, and I'm goin' to work it alone. Form into single rank, an' ride by. The first hand that goes up, drops."

Maverick Joe, despite his courage, almost fell against his young companion.

His followers had also recognized the specter with the pistols.

It was Old Jack, the driver, but he looked more like a corpse than a man in whose breast a heart was beating.

"Single file!" said Maverick Joe, glancing at his Vigilantes. "Death is at the old fellow's heart-strings. He doesn't know what he's doin'. Let no man touch 'im."

At the head of his men, the Vigilante of Custer moved forward. Chilled with terror, they all hugged the canyon wall, nor breathed until they had passed the apparition.

Beyond the specter Maverick Joe drew rein.

"Great rocks and the gods! did you all notice 'im?" he exclaimed, turning to his men.

"He is dead, stone dead!" said several. "Look! there he sits yet! just as we passed 'im. He'll tumble off when his horse moves."

The band looked back, and saw the occupant of the pass, motionless, like an equestrian statue in brass.

But suddenly the silence was broken.

"Now for the bonanza. Hurrah! for the claim what hes but one big share!"

Then the ghostly horse shot forward, and the white-faced men who looked, saw him carry his death-touched rider out of sight.

To return to the boy Vigilante and his prisoner.

The words that we have recorded as they fell from the youth's lips, told Deady Dan that his life was in imminent peril.

His arms had been pinioned at his sides, and Red Crest, the Sioux, trotted at his horse's head.

"Where is this self-styled court where you are popularly supposed to administer justice?" sneered the captive Sport, unable to curb his feelings and

impatience longer. He had turned upon the boy avenger to whose temples a flush of indignation mounted.

"We are almost there," was the answer. "You are not expecting mercy at our hands?"

"I don't ask any," was the mad retort.

"You were going to grant me much that night in the camp on the Rosebud when Red Crest interfered."

Deadly Dan shot a look of anger at the Indian which was returned with interest.

"Of course not," he said, answering his young interlocutor. "If you know what I do, boy, maybe you wouldn't blame me for wanting your life—that is, if you were in my place, and had my nature."

The eyes of Judge Lynch, Jr., dilated with astonishment; he glanced quickly at Red Crest as if fearful that the Sioux was listening. But such did not seem to be the case.

"What do you mean?" he ejaculated, without second thought, but the derisive smile that came to Dan's lips quickly told him that he had been too precipitate.

"Ha! wouldn't you like to know?" whispered Deadly Dan, leaning toward his captor. "You know that there is some secret connected with your life; you must believe that I am the possessor of it, but I can not think that you are fool—idiot enough to dream that I am going to divulge it. Do you think I will, judge?"

The boy could but notice the triumphant twinkle in his prisoner's eyes.

"A secret about me?" he asked himself. "This is the third time I have heard such hints," and while he thought, his look told Dan how wolfishly the insatiable demon curiosity was gnawing at his heart-strings.

He did not notice that they had entered Cut-throat, so intently was he gazing into the handsome young face revealed by the soft moonlight.

"We are here," fell suddenly from the Indian's lips, and the boy, throwing a hasty glance around, replied:

"Indeed, we have reached our court. Rosebud, in all your travels have you ever seen such a temple of justice?"

The last words roused him. He started like a captive who forgets that he is bound.

Red Crest was standing on the ground with a noose in his hands. Eagerness seemed to be devouring the Indian.

"Are you ready, Dan?—no praying—no last words?"

"None, but to tell you, boy, that you're hanging a man who can throw at your feet the biggest bonanza that ever existed."

"Going back to the lie, eh—to the secret you have made up? Ha! I thought you would beg at the last moment."

"Beg! who's begging?" was the flashing reply. "Dan Darrell never begged for his life. He has told the truth. As he is shortly to appear some place, beyond this planet—just where he can't say—but somewhere before a great Judge, he swears that there is a secret connected with your life."

Judge Lynch, Jr., bent forward and peered into the man's face.

Honesty was written there in characters which no eye could misjudge. The boy judge trembled; he seemed to feel that he had reached one of the most momentous periods of his life.

And he was about to hang the possessor of some important secret. The thought worried him.

"Dan, tell me. It will be the last act of your life, and one which you will not be ashamed to offer to the majestic Judge before whom you are about to appear."

If the boy had tried to suppress these words he would have failed. They forced themselves to his lips.

Deadly Dan did not move a muscle. He merely shot a rapid glance at the gallows overhead, and then permitted his eye to follow the rope to the noose in Red Crest's hand.

"For the last time, boy, I say, proceed with the execution."

A groan of disappointment fell from the young judge's lips; but it was quickly followed by a stern command.

"Now fix the noose, Red Crest."

Almost before the last word had left his tongue, the Indian's hand executed an upward move and the noose of the strong lariat dropped over Dan's head, and was tightened with a jerk.

Then the other end of the cord was fastened to the girth of the horse which the prisoner rode, and Red Crest stepped back, his work evidently done.

It was a moment fraught with the most intense interest.

The young Jeffries looked at his prisoner, and caught his eye.

It was fearless, defiant, and bright.

For several moments the twain fought the silent eye battle, then the boy withdrew from the contest.

"Good-by, Rosebud," he said. "If we ever meet again, it will be when I come after my rope."

The next instant the word "Avenger!" sharply spoken, fell from the youth's lips, and the captive's horse leaped forward, startled by the sudden blow of Red Crest's tomahawk handle.

Suddenly Deadly Dan was jerked from his saddle, and as his horse bounded away he shot up into space like an ascending rocket, actually hung by his own horse.

Not far away the animal executioner had stopped. The rope that led from his girth to the beam above was tightly stretched, far from the other end hung the body of the Wolf of the Rosebud.

One-half of his figure was in the moonlight, the rest swayed to and fro in the shadow of the beam.

Judge Lynch, Jr., sprung to the ground, and with Red Crest's help loosened the lengthy lasso which they again made fast, but this time to a large rock at the foot of the canyon wall.

Then the Indian leaped upon the horse just relieved from duty, and the two prepared to gallop away.

"A last good-by, Rosebud," said the boy judge, looking at the ghastly figure above.

"Good-by, trailer," said Red Crest, waving a farewell salute with his red hand. "No burning lodges on the trail that leads to the land of the Evil Spirit. Good-by, bad brother!"

"*Good-by, devils!*"

Whence came that voice? Or was it but an infernal echo from the shadows overhead?

Instinctively the twain looked into each other's faces.

Both had heard the startling words.

"Who is up yonder?" queried the white boy.

"No, no! 'tis the voice of the dead Wolf! Come, brother. Red Crest has heard the spirits that speak in the gulches of the Rosebud. They follow him here. If we ride like the storm, they cannot catch us."

And the next moment the Sioux urged his horse forward, and left his young companion to follow at his leisure.

"Somebody has witnessed the hanging," he said. "But, never mind! the deed is done, and the villain who basely attempted my life on the Rosebud, will never lift another knife, or burn another town."

Then he rode under the suspended man, and rejoined the Indian.

The two went down the canyon together.

CHAPTER III.

The hands which had pushed the stone over the edge of the wall were small and beautiful. They belonged to a young girl who might have reached her seventeenth year. She was of medium height, rather slightly built, with a fair, fresh skin, and sparkling black eyes. At a goodly distance she might have been taken for a member of the opposite sex, for the garment that reached but a little way below the knees was fringed after the manner of the frontier hunting-frock. Her *petite* feet were incased in a pair of Indian moccasins; and her leggins of pliable goods, reached to the strings of these picturesque shoes.

On the whole, the girl on the cliffs formed a romantic piece of living statuary in the moonlight that fell unobstructed about her.

If she was armed, her person bore no evidences of it. The weapon which she had just hurled at Tom Terror was one which could not be borne by such slender arms as hers.

She had not witnessed the Tiger's manner of dealing with old Jack the stage-driver. There were many shadows between her and the exciting drama going on below, but the voices came up to her, clear and distinct, without a syllable missing, and she heard Jack's shriek and the shots of the scarlet Thugs.

"The white Thug and his creatures are down there," fell in angry and vengeful accents from her tongue. "They have added another human being to their catalogue of victims, and he, Old Jack, the man who once looked at me till I felt my heart beat in my bosom like a bird beats herself against the sides of the cage. Oh, if I had a weapon here. I see the white Thug. I—can't I send a death missile down among them?"

As the beautiful speaker started from the edge of the cliff with flashing eyes, her heel came in contact with a stone which moved so she was almost thrown over it.

The next instant, with a quick, eager cry of vengeance, the girl pushed the rock from her with great force, and with bated breath leaned forward to watch its descent.

It shot down the side of the gulch until it struck a mass of rock that jutted from the main wall, and then, glancing off like a bomb, it went straight down like a descending cannon ball.

The wild cry of the Thugs as they attempted to dodge the singular missile

of destruction reached the listener's ears, and then came the terrible landing on the canyon road.

"Missed!" cried the girl, shrinking back with bitter disappointment written on her face.

She looked again and saw the cavalcade ride from the spot where their leader had barely escaped with his life, but springing erect she hurled after them the words we have already recorded.

"The next time, monster, my missile will strike and kill!"

Then, leaving Tom Terror to anathematize her to his heart's content, she hurried away.

"Hal will come to the cave by-and-bye. He will not regret the failure of my attack on the Canyon Terror, for he says that he intends to hang the villain some day."

As the girl glided through the forest that fringed the top of the canyon, the land sloped gradually, and at last she reached a ravine through which a stream had evidently poured its waters in days unremembered even by the oldest red inhabitants of Colorado.

Dropping into this fissure the girl crept toward the canyon, and disappeared all at once in a dark opening which was almost concealed by a network of half-dead vines.

"I always feel secure here; but I wish his days of vengeance would end. No rest, he says, until he has cleared Cut-throat of its curses. Sometimes, when I stand before him, and hear him talk of the oath of vengeance he has sworn to carry out, I almost wish that Tom Terror and his Thugs had murdered some one whom I loved, so that I could enter into the bloody campaign with him. But am I not helping? Did not the sight of the monster fire my heart with the torch of revenge, and did I not attempt the life which Hal seeks? Whom have I to avenge? I am a waif who drifted on a stray wave to this place. I never felt a mother's kiss, and the strong old gold-digger whose roof sheltered me a long time, would not let me call him father."

It was in the cave proper that these musings dropped in audible tones from the girl's lips.

This apartment was lofty, commodious, and not illy furnished. A fire, evidently kindled some time prior to the girl's present visit, burned in the middle of the floor and illuminated the place.

The walls gave evidence of encompassing a boy's home. There were several rude and ghastly pictures of hanging scenes, and over each hung a dark cord to which a small leaden ball was attached. Beside such pictures as these, six long white marks were visible on the northern wall of the apartment. At the right hand was a long vacant place which seemed to have been left by the artist on purpose to fill up with marks at some future time.

"Hal has not been here," said the girl, withdrawing her hand letterless from beneath the pillow of a cot that lay in the mellow firelight. "He went down to Custer to meet his Indian friend, Red Crest, but he said he would not be absent long. He cannot remain away a great while. I am eager to relate my adventure, and yet I am almost afraid to tell him that I disobeyed him by leaving the cave."

A few minutes later the beautiful young girl lay on the cot with her eyes fixed dreamily on the fire. She formed a sterling picture for an artist, but

only a magic brush could have laid in the wonderful colours of the scene.

An hour must have passed away before the girl moved. Then all at once, as if roused by a sound, she left the cot and leaped to a repeating rifle which her delicate fingers cocked as she lifted it from the ground.

But a figure came in sight as she sent a glance toward the mouth of the cave, and, with a cry of pleasure, the girl sprung forward.

"You did not think the Wolf had found the cave, Myra?" fell from the new-comer's lips as he came forward, and revealed himself as the boy judge.

"I did not know who had come," smiled the girl, glancing half confused at the rifle. "I have been waiting for you, for I have—"

He had dropped the hand which he had taken, and Myra, the girl, saw him go forward and halt before the six marks on the wall.

For several moments he stood there with an uneasy expression of countenance, then, as if directed by some impulse of passion, he drew a piece of chalk from his pocket, and added another stroke to the singular collection.

Myra noticed that the last mark was longer than the others.

A special enemy!" she said to herself. "I wonder if he met the Canyon Monster? No, no! he was surrounded by his Thugs."

Almost abruptly the boy Vigilante turned upon the girl; the piece of chalk still in his hand.

"One more, Myra!" he exclaimed. "Do you not see that the last mark is the longest one on the wall? Ah! girl, I met an old foe to-night; but—if he had divulged a secret which I believe he held, there would be no mark there, although I hated him with all my heart."

"A secret! a secret!" cried the girl. "Whom did it concern?"

"Me!"

"You, Hal? Why, I always thought I was the best subject for a secret—or some such mystery like they have in novels. What do you think the dead man's secret was?"

The boy shook his head; he was troubled.

"If there's a mystery concerning you, Hal, time will clear it up," she said. "But the man—was he a Thug?"

"No. His name was Dan Darrell. Deadly Dan he was called. I have told you about how he acted on the Rosebud?"

"Oh, yes. And so you met at last? Fate brought you together!"

"Yes, it must have been fate; but I did not think so when I hanged him. He said that his secret concerned me; he said it with his last breath, Myra. I believe him. Men like Dan Darrell don't die with lies on their lips."

For several minutes the pair stood face to face, speechless but thoughtful.

"I would give my right arm if Rosebud Dan was alive," cried the boy judge, starting forward. "His stubborness hung him, more than my hatred or my revenge. Look at the legacy he left behind—a tortured, doubting mind. Girl—girl, you cannot know how I have suffered since I left that wretch and his secret hanging together."

"Maybe, Hal—"

Myra, the waif, hesitated.

"Go on."

"Once you hung a foe, but the neck was not broken, and he escaped. Are you certain that Deadly Dan is dead?"

The boy avenger almost shrieked as he bounded forward;

"Ah, why did I not think of it before? No, I am not certain that he is dead. Come, girl, it is not far away; there is a certain place from whence we can look down upon the gallows. The voice. Ah! I recall it now. It frightened Red Crest; it even paled my cheek, for on the spur of the moment, Myra, I thought it came from the dead man."

The hand of the young Vigilante encircled the girl's wrist, and a moment later the two were going up the waterless ravine.

They seemed to hold their breath as they went on, the boy slightly in the advance, and not a syllable escaped their lips until more than a mile of woodland along the top of the canyon had been traversed.

"Here at last!" exclaimed the young Vigilante, halting, and then approaching the edge of the precipice. "We are directly over the beam to which I hung Rosebud Dan."

With eyes full of eagerness and suspense, the boy dropped his companion's hand, and crept forward. He was almost afraid to look over the cliff. Deadly Dan might be hanging there with the secret locked in a heart as dead and cold as a stone.

Earnestly trusting otherwise, the boy lyncher shut his lips, and was about to solve all mental questions when a stern voice rung in his ears.

"Hello thar! youngster. Do you want to go over the edge o' Cut-throat, or die whar ye ar'?"

A piercing cry fell from the girl's lips as the boy started back, sprung erect, and wheeled quickly.

"I've got ye whar I've long wanted to see ye—at the end of my rifle. Look at the stars, look at the gal, an' say yer pray'rs, for my finger's on the trigger, an' I'm goin' to send the bullet home."

There was no mercy in his voice, no hope in the expression of his face that confronted the boy.

He stood before, and in the power of, Tom Terror, the Gulch Tiger.

The boy judge was in a situation of imminent peril; not only this, but Myra, the waif, also stood before the deadly repeater which the Canyon Terror kept against his shoulder.

"He says he has long wanted to catch me napping," said Hal, to himself. "Is it for the Thugs I have strung up, or does he possess the secret that Rosebud Dan refused to divulge? I need not expect mercy at his hand; but Myra! What will the villain do with her?"

The boy's sentence was broken by a startling voice which did not fall from the Tiger's tongue.

On the contrary, it came up from below, and was followed by the furious galloping of a single horse.

"Now for the big bonanza. Hurrah for the claim that hes but one big share."

Tom Terror, starting violently, lifted his head and listened to the tread of the unseen horse.

"Fair play!" cried Hal, as he sprung forward with a drawn revolver. "Now, my good fellow, be so obliging as to fling your repeater over the wall. Quick! or there'll be a riderless horse where you now sit."

The Gulch Tiger ground his teeth with rage, and roundly cursed the accident which had diverted his attention from his foe.

"Throw it over!" continued the lyncher, sternly. "One—two—"

Accompanied by a fierce brigandish oath, and the flashing of a pair of evil eyes, the carbine disappeared over the brink of the precipice, and the boy heard the sound of its arrival on the stony road far below.

"That's sensible; now the pistols."

Another savage oath, and two large revolvers, drawn sullenly from the Tiger's belt, followed the repeating rifle.

"They'll hev a precious time hangin' me," thought Tom, as he shrugged his Atlantean shoulders and looked contemptuously at the youthful couple. "I hope they'll try; I do so, by the eyes of the gods! Then my weapons will hev company down thar."

"I tell you I'm ready," ejaculated the Canyon King as if becoming impatient. "If the court *always* hangs, here's the primest subject in Colorado. Call up the sheriff, jedge, an' let the air-dance proceed."

The boy's eyes wandered to the edge of the cliff.

"I'm not prepared to hang at this moment. In fact you have caught me without a rope, Tom Terror. But perhaps there is one handy. I'll send you after it."

"Me? Why, jedge, I might forget to come back."

"I'll attend to that," answered the boy. "Go to the edge of the wall where yon rock lies, and look over. If I am not mistaken, you'll see the gallows that I have used on two occasions."

"The timber in the wall, eh?"

"Yes; you've seen it?"

"Do you think you could climb down to it to-night, cut the subject loose that hangs from it, and bring the rope up?"

For the first time Tom Terror showed signs of weakness.

"I never tried to go down a perpendicular wall, smooth as glass—"

"Oh, there are steps—niches in it," interrupted the boy. "Go and look."

A minute's walk sufficed to bring Old Tom to the fringe of the precipice, and a moment later, with much of his old courage, he was looking over the dizzy height.

A shade of disappointment came to the faces of the watchers. He was looking down as if his suspicions had been confirmed.

"Can you cut him loose and bring up the rope?" asked the boy hanger.

"Cut who loose, an' git what rope?"

"Why the man hanging from the beam in the wall."

"Ye're mistaken, jedge; somebody's fooled ye."

"Mistaken—fooled?" echoed the boy, and he quickly thrust the revolver into Myrá's hand, saying: "You can shoot; watch that man and drop him over the cliff if he attempts to fly or attack. No man at the beam? Great heavens! what has become of Rosebud Dan?"

Rosebud Dan, rope, all had disappeared.

The boy lyncher shrunk back, for the moment unnerved. His face was colorless, and he glanced at the Gulch Giant who was trying, as it seemed, to fathom his surprise.

He staggered rather than walked back to the girl, who, revolver in hand, had not taken her eyes from Tom Terror one second.

"The Thug was right. Rosebud Dan and the rope are gone," he said.

"Cut down?"

"Heaven knows. But one thing is certain: If he was not dead the secret

may yet reach my ears. If the lasso slipped from its rocks, Deadly Dan will never divulge the secret."

He silently took the pistol from Myra's hand and looked at Tom.

"For the present you can mount your horse and go where you please," he said.

"Honest Injun, jedge? So, you're goin' to hang me, boy?"

"I am."

"You're a sneakin' little liar!" came over the gray steed's ears. "On the contrary, I'm goin' to make a widow outen thet livin' doll at yer side, then I'll leave Cut-throat an' work a bonanza bigger nor twenty Emma Kings. You heard what that fellow said down in the canyon awhile ago? He war right; the big bonanza ar' goin' to hev but one share."

As the man's lips quivered with the uttering of the last word, he turned his horse's head and spurred him away.

Hal, the lyncher, gazed after him like a person just emerging from a trance.

"He'll try to keep his word!" exclaimed Myra.

"Then you have not guessed," he said, wheeling upon her. "Tom Terror knows the secret that died with Deadly Dan—if he is really dead. My life is sought for a purpose. Oh, Heaven, what is this mystery?"

CHAPTER IV.

Than Lily, Antenat and Moravy, the three Vigilantes detailed by Maverick Joe to remain in Cut-throat for certain purposes, a trio of braver men never crossed the rushing river of the Great West.

In many places great indentations, and even caves existed, and it was into one of the latter that the three Vigilantes went after hearing their leader's command.

This cave has been visited before, especially by Antenat, the half-Creole, for on springing from his horse, he ran to a niche in the wall, and took therefrom a little package which, in the light of the fire kindled by his companions, he unwrapped with a curious smile on his dark face.

"*Parbleu!* it is here yet," he exclaimed, as the contents of the packet were exposed to view. "See, messieurs, what a pretty ring; where is the *petite* mademoiselle on whose finger it used to shine?"

Lilly and Moravy looked at the bauble, beyond all doubt a child's ring, and then turned their questioning eyes upon the exhibitor.

"Where did you get it, Antenat?" they both asked, in one breath.

"One day I was sitting on my horse, under the 'Devil's Wing,' when all at once something came down, from the sky, mebbe, and hit me plump on the hand. *Sacre bleu!* how I started and looked up. I put my hand on my pistol but there was nothing over me but the sharp, black rock and the sky, blue as my mistress's eyes. Then I looked at the ground, and there lay something that glittered. Down from the saddle went Louis Antenat, and he held in his hand this, *ma chere* comrades," and the old fellow held the little ring between thumb and forefinger, before his companion's eyes.

"A curious find," said Moravy. "And you hid it here?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a pretty thing. Look here, Lilly; there's a little diamond set on it, and here are letters on the inner surface."

"Letters?" echoed Antenat, starting.

But Moravy bent forward into the stronger firelight, and tried to make out the word engraved on the tiny ring.

"As near as I can make out," he said, as he looked, "the word, 'Jennie.' But this is the queerest place for a baby ring with a child's name on it. Just think of angels in Cut-throat, boys."

Lilly burst into a loud guffaw at his comrade's attempt at wit; but the lines of thought deepened on Antenat's face, and taking the ring, he looked at it steadily a long time.

"*Parbleu!* it shall not hide here any more," he said, suddenly. "When I found it I said I would put it away where nobody would find it, for there are fellows who would sell it for a drink of whisky. Antenat will carry it with him, hereafter. Ah! *ma petite* Jennie, some day old Louis may have the pleasure of restoring your ring."

The two men did not hear the last sentence, for Lilly had leaped up, and darted toward the mouth of the cave.

His figure was unseen for a moment, and then it sprung back into the firelight, and beckoned the others to his side.

"There! a ghost with a rope around his neck!" said Lilly. "If we had finished Tom Terror that day I could call the speerit by name, but Tom got off alive, and report says that he's hyar now, and in the flesh. When I got hyar a minute ago I heerd something come staggering down the canyon, and all at once that thing came in sight, and stopped whar it's been standing ever since."

The canyon at that point was not very wide; a gentle toss would have taken a pebble easily across, and the moonlight fell uninterrupted upon the uncanny object upon which the starting eyes of the Vigilantes were fixed.

"That's no ghost," retorted Moravy. "Speerits ar' some kind o' air thet kin git over ground without noise, but that fellow rattles the pebbles; he staggers, falls ag'in' the wall, an' then—bless my heart! his hands ar' tied! that's why he can't pick up the rope. Whar in the name of death! ar' Louis?"

The next instant the Creole answered the excited Moravy, for something long, dark and serpent-like shot through the moonshine, and fell over the head of the object staggering along the wall.

The two men at the mouth of the cave darted into the canyon with exclamations of astonishment, as the Creole jerked the "ghost" from his feet, and brought him heavily to the ground.

The little old Creole would not let his companions assist his endeavours; therefore, they could do nothing but sit by and watch.

Meanwhile the Creole worked on until at last he looked at his companions in triumph.

Wild and excited, the revenger had sprung erect, and he stood before the three Vigilantes.

"Who do you call yourself?"

"My name is Darrell."

"The same as Rosebud Dan?"

"The same."

Did Antenat's little eyes flash as he glanced over his shoulder at his companions?

"I'm sorry, monsieur, but you're the pard they want in these parts," he said, coolly, to Dan. "It arn't often thet a fellow gits hanged twice in one night. Comrades, the lasso at Napoleon's saddle—quick!"

Antenat's hand moved to his revolver as he uttered the command, but the next moment with a startling cry that resembled the hoarse intonation of the tiger, the hanged Sport darted forward.

"Another rope for me to-night? Never, by the fires of Tophet! So you, too, would hang the Wolf of the Rosebud? There, Louis Antenat, take that with my compliments."

The pistol touched the Creole's forehead as the last word fell madly from Darrell's lips, and the next moment a dull but horrible report filled the cavern.

Lilly and Moravy started back with cries of horror, and the lifeless body of poor Antenat, released by the Sport's left hand, fell quivering to the ground.

"Now lift a finger, my friends, and I'll repeat the compliment," thundered Deadly Dan, as turning quickly but coolly upon the Vigilantes, he covered them with the weapon sprinkled with the Creole's blood. "One hanging is my share. I've had that, but it was not enjoyed. I do not intend to furnish any more necks for such entertainments. Keep clear of me. Stand back! I'm still the Wolf of the Rosebud, and there's death in my right hand!"

He moved slowly back as he spoke, until, reaching the shadow of a rock at the mouth of the cave, he sprung away with a victorious cry and was gone.

CHAPTER V.

The boy judge relapsed into moody silence, and walked, without a word, at Myra's side.

The journey back to the cave was not a long one, and they entered it as the first rays of the sun, flashing over the cliffs of Cut-throat, chased the shadows of night away.

A few moments later the strange pair seated themselves before the meal, which the fair waif spread on the cavern floor, and after it had been discussed the boy took Myra's hands, and, looking into her eyes, said:

"You will not turn vengeance-hunter during my absence. This little retreat is the place for you. I want you to hear the solution of this mystery."

"And I am burning to hear it, Hal," was the quick reply. "Whither are you going now?"

"To find Red Crest. I want the Indian near me henceforward."

There was a long look of something more than friendship in the couple's eyes before they separated, and Myra's followed the figure that went away.

As the boy judge emerged from the well-chosen cave home he looked up at the heavens.

Overhead the limitless skies wore their garments of blue, but there were shadows in the narrow ravine.

Even at noon they lingered there, and as the orb of day declined they grew longer, until once more the little chasm became cold and dark.

An ominous silence reigned over the roughness of nature that surrounded the boy lyncher, and when he stepped entirely from the mouth of the cave, it was to glide down the ravine toward the large canyon.

Noiselessly he went on until, with his lithe body half-hidden by a rock, he leaned forward and beheld the floor of Cut-throat two hundred feet below.

All at once the well-known tread of horses fell upon the boy lyncher's ears.

"Maybe they'll entertain me with a drama," murmured Hal, with a smile, as, stretching his neck forward, he evinced great eagerness to catch sight of the cavaliers.

The did not keep they boy waiting, for hard upon his words two horsemen came in sight—two men whose figures made the little lyncher draw back and hold his breath for a minute.

"They were certain to get together," he said as he returned to his lookout. "They are magnets which attract each other; evil gravitates to evil, and it is but natural that Deadly Dan and Tom Terror should come together."

Wholly unaware of the keen eyes that regarded them from the mouth of the ravine, the border worthies came on and to the boy's surprise drew rein almost directly beneath him.

At the same time the rapid gallop of steeds came from the west.

"The scarlet Thugs! They are going to give me the drama!" said Hal, as he waited.

Sure enough, he soon counted six horses that came toward Tom Terror and his friend, and the scarlet Thugs of Cut-throat, well made but ferocious-looking Indians, sat before him like statues carved from blocks of granite.

"These are the boys with the strings," said Tom, waving his dark hand at his band as he turned to Deadly Dan. "I never saw 'em miss a throw in all my life. They call 'em Thugs down at Deadwood and Custer, and it's the handle that suits 'em."

The next moment Deadly Dan put out his hand which Tom Terror took, and the boy looked down and saw the lightning flash of revenge that passed between his foes.

But before that grasp was broken there came a stunning report which drove the boy back from his rock, and he heard a wild cry as Tom Terror, springing erect in his stirrups, pitched forward and completely over his horse's head.

Then, quick as a flash of powder, he turned toward the spot from whence the startling shot had come.

It was directly across the canyon, for the white smoke curling upward marked the precise spot.

"Ah! you have cheated me out of a neck," flashed Judge Lynch, Jr., catching sight of the figure on the bank. "By Jove! you shall not boast of that in Custer. Hold! my hearty; one moment and I'll pay you back."

The carbine was at the boy lyncher's shoulder, and his finger at the trigger when he saw the marksman leap to the edge of the precipice, and halt in full view of the thunderstruck band below.

"Hurrah! for the big bonanza!" he yelled, as he swung his shabby hat defiantly at the Thugs. What ar' ye looking at? I'm no comet—I'm only Bonanza Jack, soon to be *the* gold bug of the coast."

Then, with a wild half-maniacal laugh of triumph, the man turned away, and, as he did so, the repeating rifle dropped from the young lyncher's shoulder.

"I can't kill you," he said, gazing after Old Jack. "Myra says you are mysteriously linked to her. Go and enjoy your big bonanza. But I hate you because you cheated me out of a neck."

The ex-stage driver soon disappeared, and Hal when he looked down into

the canyon once more, saw the Thugs and Deadly Dan staring at the wound ghastly and terrible in the Tiger's breast.

"Men don't often recover from such a wound," murmured the boy. "But he's got the constitution of an ox, and that's in his favor."

"The man what says that Tom Terror ar' goin' to pass in his checks lies like sin. His time will not come till he's paid the rascal Jack fur this gapin' hole in his life chest. Don't look long-faced an' down-hearted, pard. I'm goin' to help you to the big bonanza. Did you ever see such an ugly hole? Why, it's big enough fur death to drive a four-in-hand into a chap's heart. They'll hunt for me," he said. Ah! I know the place fur me to rest in. I found it last summer. Lodgepole, you have not forgotten—the cave in the old ravine. Take me thar."

A few moments later the band moved slowly from the spot where the Tiger received his wound. The progress made was painfully slow, for the fact that Tom Terror lay heavily upon the scarlet arms that supported him on either side, with his dark eyes hid and teeth glued together, told that he was suffering the agonies of twenty deaths.

But guided by the young Thug, the speechless cavalcade finally left the bed of Cut-throat, and ascended to the ground above.

At that time not a soul of that band dreamed that not twenty rods ahead a fair young girl, suddenly roused from sleep, was listening white-faced and with throbless heart to the noise of their coming.

"In the name of mercy what wolves have tracked us down?" fell from her lips. "It is merciless fate that sent Harry off and left me to face them alone. But, ah! he is safe. Heaven, I thank thee for that. Ay, I am glad that I am alone."

Myra, the waif, shrunk instinctively to the northern wall where the marks of the boy lyncher's vengeance were.

As the girl stood there, and listened to the sounds made by the new arrivals, she did not allow her hands to tremble at the weapon which they encircled.

"Ar'n't we thar yet? This bullet in my trunk hes got to movin' about."

Myra, the waif, started.

That voice had a familiar sound. Six hours had not passed since she heard it behind the stock of a leveled carbine.

But what had happened? A bullet in Tom Terror's body? Then the Tiger had enemies besides the young judge.

"We must be in the cave," said another voice that seemed to come from a white man's lips. "But there are too many shadows here."

"A light, boys. Make a fire, an' while ye're at work put me down."

The kindling of the fire was not long delayed, the dry splinters of wood scraped together by the Thugs soon blazed up, and for the first time Myra saw her visitors.

She saw, too, the strong man on the floor, and in all her life the girl had never seen such a pair of wolfish eyes.

"Why, this place is inhabited!" suddenly cried Deadly Dan. "There's a cot, a stool, and clothes hanging on the wall. By my life, Tom, I believe we've invaded the boy's den."

"Ah! there's a bed, too."

"Whar?—thet's what I want just now. Whar's a nest?"

"In yon corner."

Tom Terror uttered a cry of joy, and essayed to crawl forward.

But at that moment a voice rung through the cavern and startled every one.

"Stay where you are, or I'll let fire-light into your skulls. The limbs of a murderer shall never pollute the cot where I sleep."

In an instant of time, as it were, the fair occupant of the cavern had become known to the Thugs of Cut-throat.

The fire leaping ceilingward revealed her graceful figure, her determined white face, and the deadly weapon in her hands.

Deadly Dan Darrell, with a cry of amazement on his lips, started from the sight, while Tom Terror, having suddenly relinquished his attempted crawl to the bed, gazed at her in silence.

She showed no signs of life, save in the sparkling of her beautiful eyes which drew much of Rosebud Dan's attention.

"By Jove, she's a beauty," he ejaculated. "What a queen she'd make for me when I get my fingers on the pile. The boy and she are earrying on business together; but I'm going to break up that partnership."

"I'll make tarms, pard," said Tom, flashing the glare of his wolfish eyes upon the speaker.

"You speak of terms," she said. "These are mine. Stand aside and let me pass."

"They're easy," was the answer. "We don't make war on women, an' I guess you'll never set the world afire if we do let you go."

She could not avoid the handsome, eager eyes of Deadly Dan. She had seen him for the first time; but something proclaimed his identity.

"So you accede to my terms?" she said. "I am to pass out?"

"Yes, my beauty."

At Tom Terror's command, the Indians drew sullenly back, and Myra with a light cry of triumph sprung toward the opening. As she reached Deadly Dan she heard him say:

"Go straight to Custer, girl. I'll kill the man that touches you."

Myra started at such words in such a place, but did not pause. She was eager to get beyond the flashing eyes that regarded her, beyond the strings of the Thugs.

But alas! for such hopes and expectations.

All at once something was seen to whirl around an Indian's head, and Deadly Dan with a mad oath sprung forward to prevent the fatal throw.

But in vain.

Caught by the swift messenger of death, Myra stopped, and reeled, at the same time dropping the rifle.

The Canyon Spider uttered a cry of delight.

"Ha! ha! strung, my beauty. That's the kind o' tarms I give the she wolves, pard."

But Deadly Dan did not hear his comrade, for he had leaped forward, and prevented Myra from falling to the earth.

The Indians, too, had sprung toward her.

"Back! you infernal stranglers," thundered the Wolf, as he turned upon them, a heavy revolver cocked in his right hand. "Stand where you are with your hands on your cords, but draw one if you dare. This creature

doesn't deserve your strings. From this moment she is mine. Deadly Dan is her protector, and he's going to make her the wife of the greatest gold-bug in the States."

The Thugs of Cut-throat, almost consumed with rage, were cowed by Deadly Dan and his revolver.

"Make 'er what you please, pard," said Tom Terror, breaking the silence. "Thar mustn't be any hard lines betwixt us. The big bonanza ain't found yet, an' she ain't the gold-bug's wife. I call my red wolves off. Now, bring the gal up to the fire."

The Indians obeyed their leader, but looked daggers at the man who had cowed them.

"You will pardon me, Tom," Dan said, coming forward. "This is a prize a fellow doesn't draw every day. Permit me to present to you the future wife of Rosebud Dan, the future money king of the States."

Tom Terror grinned as, despite his wound, he bent down to gaze into the finely chiseled face that Dan had lowered into the mellow firelight.

"Purty as a picter!" he ejaculated. "But what's that on her right temple, Dan? Didn't you say that a little mole shaped like a bean—"

A startling cry pealed from Darrell's throat; he thrust his face between Tom and the girl's, and the next moment, with the wildest of looks in his eyes, he sprung up as Myra fell from his arms.

"Thunder and guns!" fell from his lips, as he gazed first at Tom and then at the unconscious waif. "Is it possible that I've been tracking the wrong person the best years of my life? Tom, you stare but don't speak. Can't you say a word, and confirm—no! dispel my terrible suspicions?"

Tom Terror shook his head.

"So," he said, looking up into Rosebud Dan's startled countenance, "so the baby was a girl?"

Then, as if determined to have the rest and attention that his wound demanded, despite the new and exciting phase the adventure was assuming, he staggered toward the cot.

"I reckon she'll hardly get to be the gold-bug's wife now," he muttered, as he fell upon the skin and fixed his eyes on the Wolf. "He'd give an arm of that mole warn't on her face. We used to think that it war on somebody else's."

The next moment he turned away, and shutting his teeth hard, tried to kill the groan of agony that came up from his shattered breast.

CHAPTER VI.

Again we must convey the reader to the wild metropolis of the Black Hills.

In the bar-room which we have once visited the Vigilantes of Custer were again congregated.

Morany had a story to tell which sent a chill of horror to the hearts of the iron hangmen who surrounded him, and in rough but eloquent language he told the story of Rosebud Dan's singular capture and the death of the Creole Antenat.

At the mention of the Wolf's cognomen an attentive listener on the outer rim of the spell-bound circle started as if struck in the side by a dirk.

This was Red Crest.

What! the man whom he had helped to swing over a beam still alive, and capable of taking human life with the revolver?

The Indian was superstitious; he could not believe all of Moravy's narrative.

A spirit, not a living being, had entered the cave and taken Antenat's life

But, thought the Sioux a moment later, the guards lassoed something tangible; they dragged it into the cavern, and it was this person who shot and killed.

Red Crest, if questioned about the matter at that time, would have told the story of Deadly Dan's hanging.

"What do you say, Indian?"

But Red Crest kept his lips sealed.

For what purpose did these lawless men want to know Judge Lynch Jr.'s, whereabouts? Time and again they had sworn vengence against him, they had even hunted him among the shadows of Cut-throat.

"Boys, thar's grit in Red Crest," said the Vigilante captain as he sent a smile among his impatient men. "He hesn't got a spark of betrayal in him."

The Indian, who had not removed his eyes from Maverick Joe for a second, made a sign for him to proceed.

"I propose that the boy take command of the Vigilantes of Custer—that we swear to follow whar he leads—that we stand by him through thick and thin, and let him hang when he wants to. That's the ticket that Maverick puts into the box. Boys, I want Cut-throat cleaned out. When the Mining Commission comes hyar to report on our wealth, I want 'em to ride through that grand old canyon and never feel any o' them infernal strings around their silken necks. Thar's Cut-throat, boys, the glory of Colorado—it's a real canyon of the gods, and I say, put the boy at the head of the Vigilantes of Custer, and change its name to Paradise Gap, or something else that don't suggest wiping out!"

The men with a wild shout of approval on their lips could hardly wait until Maverick Joe concluded, but when he clinched the sentence by a mighty sweep of his arm, a cheer rose that fairly shook the building.

"He will not reject the proposition."

For a moment the boy leader's keen eyes swept the score of bronzed faces before him. Then he stepped forward.

"To saddle!" he said, in a voice of command. "The Thugs of Cut-throat are desperate as starving wolves. Let every man remember this. They may not be death with their strings in every instance, but with the rifle and the revolver they never miss. So, avengers of Colorado, I grant you five minutes for good-byes to wives and sweethearts."

"I don't think thar's a chap hyar who owns any such property!" cried Maverick Joe; "least-wise, thar 'r' only sixty women in Custer, an' they b'long to luckier fellars. No kissing when we go to battle, captain."

With wild eyes, flashing with triumph, Jack Drivewell sat once more on his horse, his haggard face turned toward Cut-throat.

He did not look like a sane man; there was the unmistakable make-up of the lunatic about him.

He sat there statue-like and stern until a sound startled him, and made his eyes flash.

Quick as a flash of lightning he drew his revolvers and leaned forward.

But the next instant he started back and hugged the canyon wall. In that position he sat and held his breath while Captain Harry and his Vigilantes rode past entirely unconscious of his presence.

"The boy and Maverick together?" he repeated twenty times. "What does it mean? Ah, if I thought they war huntin' the big bonanza, I'd hev asserted my right to the whole claim."

The Vigilantes moved on, their hoof-beats did not rouse the echoes of the canyon; but Old Jack still occupied his halting-place.

CHAPTER VII.

All through the day which came after the night that witnessed the surprise of Myra, the waif, by Tom Terror and his Thugs, six Wolves watched with the fatal cord in their hands for the return of the boy lyncher.

But he did not come. Back in the cavern proper, with that ghastly colouring which comes to the faces of the dying, the white Thug reclined on the rude cot. His wound had been roughly but well dressed, and the gentle hands of the girl of mystery had moistened his lips with water.

All at once the fair girl started, for an Indian had leaped to the cot, and was talking in low tones to the wounded Thug.

Her heart seemed to stand still. She felt that Harry was coming, that he was about to walk in the death-trap which cunning had prepared for him.

How she strained her ears to catch a sentence, a word of the Indian's communication. As well she might have listened for the sound of a zephyr! But she saw the giant's eyes flash while his hireling talked; she caught the quick nod of approval that he gave, and saw the Thug bound toward the entrance again.

"Why don't Dan come back?" murmured the cut-throat. "I recollect now he left shortly after he saw the mole on the gal's face. The time has come!" she heard him say as if the words gave him a sort of wolfish pleasure. "Thar's to be a good deal of dyin' with boots on in the old Cut-throat. Whar's the gal?"

"Here, Captain Tom," answered Myra, and the next moment she stood before the robber of the gulch, from whom a few hours since she would have fled with a shriek.

"So hyar ye ar'!" he said. "I'm goin', never to come back. I'll never pull my boots off ag'in. Stay hyar till somebody comes; it won't be me; it won't be Deadly Dan. But, somebody will come an' take you away. You're the biggest bonanza in Colorado, ef you ar' but a mite. One o' these days you'll be a gold queen. Dan got on the wrong trail, an' now he's run away from the right one. Run off an' left the work for my boys with the cords. I told 'im to give you the strings last night, but I'm kinder glad thet Rosebud interfered an' saved yer life."

The old fellow dropped Myra's hand, and started toward the mouth of the cave where two bronzed faces waited for him; but the girl bounded forward.

"You haven't disclosed anything!" she cried. "What you have said makes me curious. Whose child am I? Captain Tom, will you not lift the veil of mystery that has hung before me so long? Who is the boy?"

"The boy?" and Tom Terror grated his teeth. "Oh, the young 'un what has carried on court in Cut-throat for six months?"

"Yes, yes!"

"He's nobody in partic'lar. You're the mystery, gal. Thar!"

The thought of the terrible scenes that might soon populate the chasm rushed upon the girl's mind faster than she could speak. They came like the pictures of some mighty panorama, and when in one she saw Harry, the avenger, struck down by the man he had sworn to hang, she reeled away with a cry of horror.

When she recovered, the cavern was still. The fire burning brightly on the stone floor told her that she was the only tenant of the cave. The silence was oppressive.

"Can I not see something from the rock?" she exclaimed. "It would kill me to remain here while the last dread encounter was taking place in Cut-throat. I will go!"

The waif of the gap hurried from the cave, and a few moments later she was gliding through the shadows of the ravine with which she was thoroughly acquainted.

The girl sprung back with a startling cry; the thunderous report of fire-arms had broken the silence and the flash almost blinded her.

Again and again the shots sent her warm blood like lava through her heart; she heard oaths, cries, the wild struggling of enemies in deadly combat.

They had met!

But who were the white men whose voices assailed her ears?

Ah! Tom Terror and his Thugs had encountered Maverick Joe and his Vigilantes; not the boy lyncher.

The Vigilantes had conquered; their voices told her this, and she wanted to send down to them her approval of their success.

But something checked her. Those men hated the boy lyncher. They had even hunted him, and she—she could not admire such men.

Myra turned from the rock, but the next instant she found herself face to face with a figure that brought a cry to her lips.

"Here you are, my beauty! By Jove! they've been settling matters down in the gulch. I thought you were gone when I found the cave empty; but here you are, the girl to make the gold queen of the Eastern coast."

The waif saw the glitter of the man's eyes.

"Are you certain about your own neck, Deadly Dan?"

The villain stopped and dropped the hand that he held; then his revolver leaped upward, but the report which followed quickly upon the question, caused it to fall as suddenly.

"Draw again and I'll spoil your face!" said the deadly marksman. "I have just closed one session of court, and now I will open the last one I shall ever hold in Cut-throat. Stand where you are! This time Red Crest and I will see that the noose is properly adjusted. Jennie—Myra—go on into the cave; there's somebody there who wants to see you."

The girl sprung forward with a parting look at Deadly Dan.

That villain bit his lips; the prize for which he had trailed and shot for ten years was gliding from his grasp.

He was doomed to the rope once more.

"Why did I come back to Cut-throat? War thet what ye asked me, Maverick?" asked Tom Terror, as he looked down into the Vigilante's face from the saddle to which several of the red survivors of the gulch battle had helped him, bleeding from a fresh wound. "I see no harm in tellin' the why

an' wherefore now. A big bonanza brought me back. Deadly Dan knows more about it than I do; but I know that a million or more is tremblin' in the balances on the Atlantic Coast. He sent me back to find an' to kill; but he thought he'd better come, too. Ha! ha! I'm afeared he'll never tech the rocks, for it turned out to be a gal."

Captain Harry started at the man's words.

"A girl!" he ejaculated.

"Yes; your sweetheart. Did you think it war you?" and the wounded man smiled grimly. "Last night Rosebud found an' recognized her."

"And did his work?"

"No; he ran off. But, mebbe he's back by this time. He'd rather see her the gold queen of the cities than use his knife, for she's purtier'n all creation."

The Vigilantes looked at the boy.

"We can't talk here," Harry said. "Are you ready, Tom?"

"My boots ar' on. Therefore, Tom Terror ar' ready."

Red Crest leaped forward at a sign from the boy, and the strong noose fell over the Tiger's drooping head.

But vain, almost, was that long-delayed vengeance, for when the death noose tightened around Tom's short stretch of throat, the soul of the ruffian had gone to be judged.

"Now for Myra!" cried the boy.

A scene totally unexpected greeted the eyes of the girl waif when she re-entered the cavern.

Stretched on the cot drawn close to the fire lay the body of a man whose face was haggard in the extreme. His eyes beaming with expectation, glittered intensely as the fair one appeared.

"I know it!" he exclaimed. "Ef I hev lost one big bonanza, I've found another; an' one, too, all in one share. Jennie! Jennie! come an' tell me thet the long-lost claim hes come back to Old Jack!"

The girl did not hesitate, and the next moment her gentle face was pressed to the rough cheek of the old driver.

"I know it would come," said Maverick Joe, feelingly. "Old Jack has found the big bonanza. Captain Tom would have hired him to hunt down his own child, of Rosebud hadn't interfered."

It was a scene from which the rough Vigilantes withdrew, and when the last one had departed, they left the twain there with lip glued to lip.

When the party returned to the cavern they found Jennie—Myra no longer, that being the name by which Captain Harry knew her—seated beside the cot holding the dead hand of Bonanza Jack, her father.

His tale had been told; she knew all, and she told Harry that with his last breath he had thanked fortune for preserving his life until he had found his child.

Here we must put aside the pen; but not until we have informed the reader that Maverick Joe, now a veritable gold-bug, has just arrived from the West to witness a wedding ceremony, and to give the blushing bride away.

And if somewhere in the fashionable assembly the interesting face of a young Indian is seen, we may be sure that he is the gallant Red Crest of our canyon romance.

THE END.

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